


BECK'S BEER





BACK BRAIN RECLUSE

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ILLUSTRATED BY DAVE WINDETT (pp.2 & 3), MATT BROOKER (pp.5 - 19, 32 - 4) AND KAISER BILL.

PROFIT MAKING MAGAZINE



A Leap in the Dark

Steve Sneyd

"Now, look, Jim, don't let this go any further, but I'd a funny experience the other night."

"Wife took her false teeth out?"

"No, I'm serious, Jim. Having another?"

"Alright - make it a Guinness, I need something strong if you're going to tell the tale, it's dry work listening to your stories, no offence meant."

The drinks were bought, then, back in the quiet partitioned corner where none could overhear: "Alright, Joe, get on with it, then. It's not another of these stories of how you nearly made a fortune off a load of bras with one cup a different size from the other that fell off the back of a wagon, is it?"

"Look, I'm serious ... now will you damn well listen or have I to tell the barmaid you've got a dose?"

"If I have, she gave it me ... alright, alright," spreading his hands in resignation, "the grave, that's me, not a word till you finish ... wish I'd gone home and watched the match on TV now ... ok, ok."

It had started with a soft thud in the darkness outside. Normally Joe would've slept right through it, he was sure; he woke to an afterecho that told him somehow it hadn't been all that loud. But he'd just had his ears syringed to get rid of a wax buildup that must've been going on ages, and as a result he was hypersensitive to noise just now. A glance at his LCD watch,

glowing sweet as a nut in the dark - 'd've been well worth the money even if he'd had to pay shop price. 13:15. 1:15am in this daft British Rail type time that'd come in these days, like the kids all wittering about centimetres and kilometres like a load of foreign monkeys. Someone in the garden? He thought of asking his wife if she'd heard the noise, but she was sleeping like the dead and anyway she was usually either bad-tempered or randy if woken suddenly, and he didn't feel up to facing either mood.

Quietly across the room, barefoot, pull the curtains back. Faint moonlight, the moon only new, but enough to spot a burglar if one was there, trying a drill out on the window-frame or poking around for a ladder in the hut or whatever. Nothing ... not even a shadow. Cat or hedgehog, maybe. Then he saw something white and moving, wriggling maybe, right in the middle of the scruffy back lawn where it never got cut just trampled on the way to the clothes line and the bonfire heap.

"So what'd you do ... go back to bed? I know I would've, wildlife never did interest me much ... now pussy, that's different!"

"Get your mind above your crotch for once ... no, I was curious now, anyway I knew I wouldn't get back to sleep till I found out what it was, and with still being on short time I'd no need to get up in the morning anyhow, good excuse for a lie-in a disturbed night ... not that you need one, being

married ..."

"Never get one ... they're always too worried about their hubbies getting home from night shift or the neighbours seeing or the kids coming into the bedroom."

"I was born a lot too soon ... now in my day we never went near a married ..."

"Get on with it, grandad ... so you went downstairs ... so what was it?"

"I went downstairs ... couldn't think what to take as a weapon, just in case, you never know these days, got just like America this country, violence all over, stamp on your face as soon as look at you. Then I remembered the old chair I'd been supposed to be mending for a week or so, well about a year really. Looked under the stairs, it was there alright, right at the back of the staircupboard, all buried under junk, anyway, got it out at last, took the loose leg, put some wellies on and my anorak, the fancy one with the ski-type reflective flashes on, you know which I mean, got it cheap, the zip was funny, out the back door and round the path."

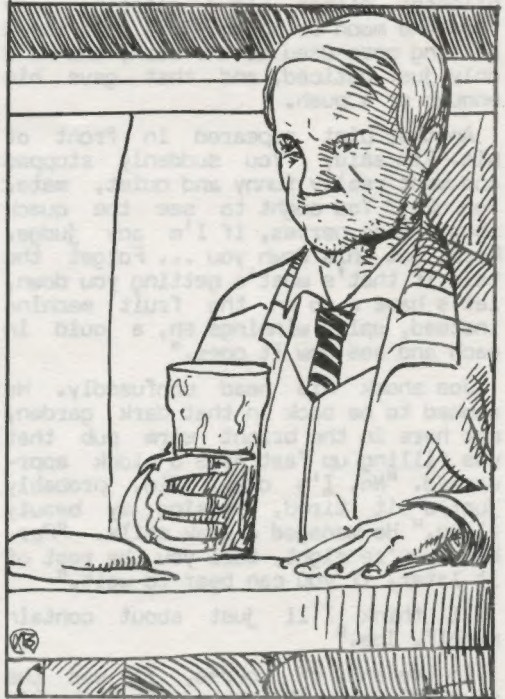
It sounded glib as he told it. It hadn't been quite like that in real life.

In fact, it must've taken ten minutes to find the chair leg, have a quick drag of a cigarette in the kitchen, convince himself he was doing the right thing to go outside. Could be nothing, a trick of the light. Could be a trick to get him outside and stab him, rob him ... that neighbour he'd fallen out with, one or two people he'd short-changed on deals ... or some random psychopath ... cyclepath his wife called 'em, laugh ... yeah, it'd said on the radio one'd got away up Scotland, only a couple hundred miles away, nothing with the motorway, could easy have got here by tonight.

And finally, forcing himself to unlock the kitchen door, step out on to the path, warily, looking both ways as if about to cross a busy road. Shadows making untrimmed sycamore and elder bushes, his parody of a hedge, seem huge and menacing. Foot caught one of the empties out for the milkman ... damn ... dived for it, caught it,

didn't break. A lucky omen. Feeling a little more cheerful, he walked stiffly along the side of the house, reminding himself that thugs, like animals, were supposed to be able to smell fear, at all costs he mustn't let any show, even inside his head, they could tell by the smell your glands let off or something.

Past the dustbin ... lid off again, probably dogs scavenging as usual ... put it back on, another excuse for not turning the corner round the back. Stooping, he'd exposed his back unwarily, silly that, never did it on the TV. Back to the wall by the drainpipe, reached for another cig. Forgotten his matches. Nipped back for them, and, back in the kitchen, felt even more unwilling to go out again that he had the first time, as if that white wriggling lump in the grass must by now surely have grown monstrous beyond belief. Towering, perhaps, to the bedroom window ... to attack his wife? Serve her right, silly old cow ... and then he laughed at himself, so stupid



all this chat, talk yourself into a panic, worse than those late night Horror Double Bills on the box what he was imagining, much worse, they were a joke, really, clumsy fakes, this would be, too ... probably just a towel his wife'd forgotten to bring in off the line had fallen down and only this newly regained sensitivity in his ears had made him notice.

Yet he found himself walking crabwise along the wall, back to it ... and then hoping to Christ no neighbour looked out just at that moment, bog-bound, he must look a right tree, the human fly I don't think. The corner again ... peep round. And of course the damn forsythia bush hid that part of the lawn.

Just then he heard a faint noise from that direction, soft and slithery and dry and hoarse and whispery all at once, like an old man clearing his throat to gob dirty great lumps of phlegm everywhere, dirty old sod. Stop or go? He felt like a traffic light that couldn't make up its mind ... needed a push. It came a little brighter, either cloud clearing away from the moon or maybe just his eyes getting more used to the dark, and he'd only just noticed, and that gave him enough of a push.

Another pint appeared in front of him. Jim said, "You suddenly stopped and went really funny and quiet, mate. You okay? You ought to see the quack about those nerves, if I'm any judge. Here, get this down you ... Forget the tale if that's what's getting you down, let's have a go on the fruit machine instead, split winnings eh, a quid in each and see how it goes."

Joe shook his head confusedly. He seemed to be back in that dark garden, not here in the bright warm pub that was filling up fast as 9 o'clock approached. "No, I'm okay, Jim, probably just a bit tired, missing my beauty sleep." He managed a weak smile. "Perhaps you're right, tell you the rest of it later, if you can bear to wait."

"I think I'll just about contain myself, Joe."

In the end, of course, it was the usual division of labour. Jim with his quick fingers and quicker wits worked

all the knobs and controls, the seductive Nudges and summoning Holds, battled against complex calculations of odds and harassing bleeps and whistles to search for the elusive grail of profit on their investment in the Country Harvest machine in which the three lemons or grapes or whatever appeared in a slot cut into an inwardly illuminated repro of what he knew from TV was Constable's 'Haywain', all ripeness and sun ... and Joe stood behind him and watched hypnotised the movements of machine and man, so interacting it was hard to tell which played the other, and muttered encouragement when tokens clattered down the payout slot and commiserations when a wrong decision lost the chance of a line that would've paid ... and all the time, tonight, the much realer world of last night unfolded.

Up the cracked cement steps past the coal-house. Round the forsythia, cautious, slow, as if moving into the field of view of a sniper.

Wished for another cig ... but it was too late. Because it was nearer the bush than he'd thought ... right at his feet so that he almost bumped into it, and leaped back in shock, nearly tripping against the hut and, he was sure, breaking off one of his few surviving roses ... as if that mattered now. Chairleg, all this time forgotten in his hand ... he must somehow have lit his cig one-handed, for he didn't remember ever putting the splintery wooden club down, let alone lighting this fresh fag ... now pressed painfully into his clenching palm to remind him it was there if needed. He peered across the couple of yards distance at the white object, trying to make it out. About the size of a plastic shopping bag ... for a brief instant he hoped, believed, it was, full of pegs perhaps, just his wife's damn fool sort of trick, leave 'em out to rot in the rain ... excuse for buying another lot from the gypsies, she hated to say no to them, afraid of their meaningless daft curses, he soon told 'em where to go ... or a head maybe ... sunk into grass, maybe the earth below too, the grass too long to tell for sure. In the hedge beyond, overgrown tangle of lilac and broken fence and dying privet, he

saw bright eyes ... jumped ... then realised just a watching cat, showing no signs of coming nearer. More sense than him, Joe thought, but already his feet were moving.

Hit it with the stick, first, kill it, then find out what it was, that was the best idea ... and he had the stick already raised to bring crashing down on the soft pulpy blunt cylinder that he was sure instinctively would be vilely slimy to the touch, when suddenly his conscious mind told him what he must have unconsciously realised some time before ... that words were coming into his head ... or his ears, anyhow, they seemed to fill him ... whip-sharp yet whispers ... shapeless yet clear ... dry and very old ... fresh and young and wet with dew ... all mixed up ... like a pop song made for these young kids that someone middle-aged like Joe could never understand properly and yet always half-felt, though he'd never admit it to any of these young idiots, held some great meaning, some answer, if only he could grab hold of it ... a waking dream ... maybe all



this was a dream ... and the voice told him to gently pull ... he grasped, surprised to find not vile slug-dampness but a brittle dryness. A whispering cry of pain ... more gently, more gently, the command ... up, up it came, whatever, till waist height and still coming ... wormlike, as big around as a girl's waist ... and the voice, explaining, growing wearisome ... "I am a traveller from your planet ... but gone far outward among the stars ... from long beyond your time ... some error in the equations, the Fitzgerald-Lorenz Contractions, I will not try to explain ... has brought me back before my time ..."

"You're not human, never human, we're not going to turn into things like you, never, never," Joe whispering so's not to wake the neighbours even as revulsion swept him at the thought of a world of beings like this worm, worse even than all the other chages in his time, the decimalisation, the Common Market, pelican crossings that made you run like a madman, like cattle, across a road, underpasses, muggers' alleys, bet they gave the Council a cut ... the new shopping centre, couldn't find half the old pubs ... the Bomb ... maybe that was it, maybe he was one of these mutants they talk about that grew from this radiation, and Joe jumped back, hands off in wild nausea, turning away to vomit ... and the unsupported extrusion of whiteness flopped sideways on to the grass, groaning again with that all but soundless pain, and at last its sounds calmed, and it spoke again.

"I was just like you, once, brother" brother, this thing, brother ... and his hand tightened again on the chairleg ... this stranger, this, this RUBBISH ... and the voice said "but travelling so far so weightlessly our bones lost calcium and we became as you see me now ... and when we returned the ship burned, and I floated down ... till at last the capsule too dissolved in fire about me, and I fell the last ... distance, I know not how great, having lost consciousness ... but having no solidity, no bones to break, survived, embedded merely in your ground, and now need your aid to release me, to fetch expert help, to complete my mission with news before

A LEAP IN THE DARK

Steve Sneyd

its time of other worlds we found, before its time, but doubtless still of value to your time, which I was taught was troubled at the core, warring over ever scarcer scraps. Now, help me, and you will win fame and wealth."

The machine dropped two quids worth of tokens at one go ... top payout, that, and Jim bought more drinks, face hot with glee and triumph. He clapped Joe on the shoulder. "Better than finding old rubbish in your garden, eh ... what was that thing you were on about, anyhow, when it all comes out?"

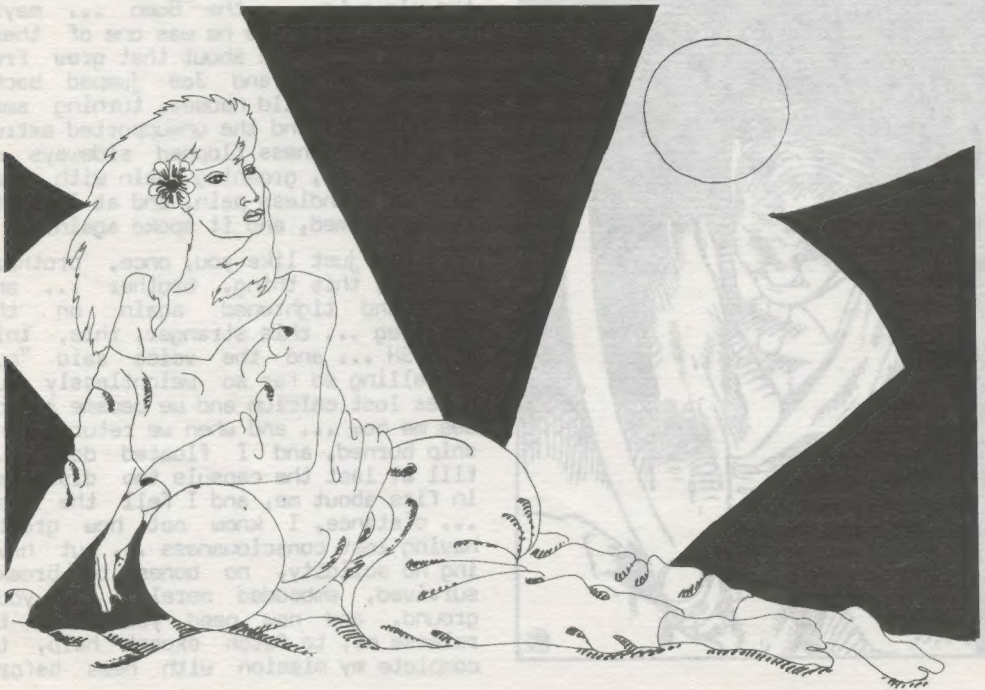
"Nothing ... a dead bird, well, nearly dead. The cats got it, nothing left by morning." Joe spoke absently, taking a great gulp of the new pint.

That was true at least ... nothing there but odd shreds of skin in the morning, scattered round the ragged hole in the soil amid yards of grass

trampled and littered with tufts of cat fur of many colours. Obviously they had fought hard over the prize. His arm still ached a little from the impact as he had wielded the chair leg. Have to burn it ... some fool might test the stains on it and claim them human. Human ... that monster ... how dare it come into his garden and try and involve him ... hadn't he troubles enough of his own, keeping clear of the law and the wife quiet and finding enough money for a drink or two once in a while, what right had THEY to try and make him help THEM change the world even more than the mess they'd already made ... worms ... human worms ... the cats had the right idea, clear up all the rubbish, clear up any fledgeling fallen from the nest ... "Just a nearly dead bird ... always try to fly before they know how properly, I've seen it often."

"We're quite the little philosopher,

The Girls In Summe



A LEAP IN THE DARK

aren't we, Joe ... you'll put Margaret off serving us talking so sad, no point in being alive unless you get a laugh, eh Margaret, bit of slap and tickle, nudge nudge wink wink." Like a fruit machine, that blinks, thought Joe, and suddenly felt weary. "You off early, then?"

"Aye, I missed a lot of sleep last night."

"Right, see you then, Joe ... now, as I was about to say, Margaret, about tonight ..."

Feeling resentful somehow, Joe left. Resentful that no one had listened. Resentful that he couldn't have explained anyway. Resentful, above all, that somehow he had in the end been at fault.

As if he had been put to flight.

THE END

r Dresses

When the sun is a bright badge
Tucked on a velvet blue jacket
Hung high above the houses,
What else could a man wish for
Than the chance to watch that
Posse of beautiful summer girls,
As they fascinate the day
With happy charms and smiles.
When the afternoon heat overwhelms
And perspiration starts to trickle,
There is nothing more refreshing
Than the sight of swaying cotton,
Drifting through the streets
Like coloured tissues holding the breeze.
With bronzed arms and spring water eyes,

The girls in summer dresses
Are a sheer delight,
An ecstasy which cultivates
The icy hearts of lonely men,
And a temptation to arouse
The minds of those who thought
They were secure.

Ray Jon

interzone

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SORRY!

It is with regret that the price of BACK BRAIN RECLUSE has had to be raised by 10 pence. This is due to increased printing costs. The good news is that you can avoid the price rise by taking out a subscription of £2.00 for four issues. See the inside back cover for details.

The Quiet Clouds and the Crows

Breda Sweeney

It was almost eight. A quiet dusk blurred the Kerry landscape from its frame. Behind the latticed windows of the cottage Mireade held her focus on the world for a few moments longer. A faint sound of an engine, distant, but reaching across the vacant countryside.

Mireade tensed, gripping the wheels of her chair till her knuckles whitened. A motorcycle approached, cracking the still air.

The screeching engine silenced with an abrupt thud, vibrating through the walls of the cottage. The screaming metal bounced on along the tarmac. A tiny body flew from it, helplessly catapulted to the roadside hedge.

Mireade wailed. She leaned forward from her wheelchair, pressing her face to the cold pane.

"Mother ... an accident ... come quickly."

She scoured the scene for movement. Her aged mother shuffled from the back of the cottage. Mireade watched the frail old woman battle with her slowness, her inadequacy to cope with the situation, her face a picture of her tormenting helplessness. The old lady laboured her way to the road. Bending for a short time over the wreckage, and straightening again, looking westward to Tralee. It was two miles away. She pulled her black shawl closer to her and set off. Mireade strained all her senses to see, hear something. There was nothing. Only the

quiet clouds, and the crows pegged to bare April branches.

Night fell. But Mireade remained at the window. A slow chant fell from her lips.

"Naa-naaa ... naa-naaaa ..." she imitated the ambulance siren, impatient, roused to a secret excitement. The hour was late when the cottage was illuminated by headlights.

Mother was returned by the police, trembling, crying and frozen. They would return tomorrow, they said, to take a statement from her daughter.

"Is anybody dead?" Mireade asked her mother, "... it's Matthew again ... you know it is."

The painful silent tears on the aged cheeks were her only reply.

"No more ... no more," her mother rocked herself to and fro in her anguish. And sleep soon spattered a vague pattern on the night.

The motorcyclist was dead. His daughter, who was a passenger, survived with only minor injuries.

"Did you see how it happened?" the police were asking Mireade.

"He just seemed to lose control of the bike, he fell forward over the front of the bike, he didn't hit anything, or skid."

"His daughter tells us he shouted to her, just before he lost control, 'They're pushing me ... they're pushing

THE QUIET CLOUDS AND THE CROWS

Breda Sweeney

me."

Mireade and mother exchanged knowing glances.

"It's Matthew again, it's Matthew again!" Mireade shouted, propelling her chair violently back and forward.

"Oh not the ghost again," the detective dismissed the idea cynically.

"Not just a ghost," mother whipped, "he was my father ... and how do you account for it ... all those accidents, just on this stretch of the road, all around eight o'clock, and always the people are pushed into the road, in front of cars, or pushed against the steering wheel, and now pushed off a motorcycle."

The police were as much captivated by gossip as any other local. The fact that Matthew Sullivan was the old lady's father was a new revelation to them, and would consequently be to the population of Kerry. They had a job to do, but had the time to find out more, nevertheless.

Everybody knew of poor old Matthew, dwarfed and hunchbacked. There was a sketch of him at the local church, partly toothless, hook-nosed, and supposedly unfortunate in every physical feature. He had been an outcast. Taunted by youths, hunted and abused by local farmers. He was to blame for disease in cattle, crop failure, and any other unexplainable and unfortunate event. Eventually he was put to a tortuous death by local people who feared him more than God. But not before swearing revenge.

The despairing old lady wanted to talk. The story must out.

"He used to take me to Foley's Glen, to pick mushrooms ... we'd bring home a pillowcase full. And he'd carry me home on his shoulders. And we'd sing with the birds ... the one that sings that song ... 'a little bit o'bread and no cheese, a little bit o'bread and no cheese'. And he bred roller canaries and sold them, and shot the odd rabbit ... but he did harm to no-one, never hurt no-one."

The room fell into silence. The bemused policemen were still pondering the notion of the repulsive Matthew

fathering a child, and wondering who the mother might have been. But the old lady wept bitterly at the hearth now, and there was no more to be gained by staying.

But if the police were not interested in the ghost of Matthew Sullivan then others were. Mireade and her mother received a letter from a gentleman from a Dublin newspaper, who was interested in following up ghost stories. He was to pay them a visit.

He arrived some days later, with a friend, and spent a long afternoon listening to their story, and accounts of numerous accidents on the stretch of road outside their cottage. They both decided to stay till eight o'clock to see if there was anything to experience.

Mireade took up her favourite place by the window, to watch the two men by the side of the road. Her excitement mounted as the hour neared. Five to. The men chattered carelessly. They were not afraid. Mireade tensed. To her it seemed the violence of death was to repeat itself.

The scene was set. Just as it had been a few nights before. The hall clock chimed as if to announce the entrance of the players. Mireade leaned forward. She held the two men framed in the lattice. Then, the change was sudden and furious. One man left the picture violently, projected fiercely across the road. His face and hands skimmed the surface.

"Naa-naaaa, naa-naaaa." Mireade jolted her chair backwards and forwards.

The man was helped to the cottage. Mother bathed the cuts and scratches and saw that both men downed a good sized whiskey.

"I was lucky ... there was no traffic coming ... I heard a woman's voice, whispering a name ... Matthew ... she said ... Help me Matthew ... and I felt hands, in the middle of my back, pushing me."

Mireade was still at the window, muttering keenly to herself, as if scolding the empty landscape.

THE END

SUBMIT YOUR STORIES TO BACK BRAIN RECLUSE

BACK BRAIN RECLUSE welcomes any unsolicited submissions, but it would be helpful if the following points are kept in mind:

1. Normal manuscript submission procedure applies - typed double space on one side of preferably white A4 paper.
2. Enclose an SAE for the return of copy and a second SAE if you require acknowledgement of receipt.
3. Normal requirements are PROSE, approx 4000 - 5000 words or shorter, though longer will be considered if the quality warrants.
4. There are no genre restrictions: submissions are assessed on standard of writing, originality, innovation and how thought provoking they are.

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Professor Mif and the Ancient Burial Urns

Dr. John Light

Professor Mif surveyed his audience. They sat in semi-circular tiers rising towards the ceiling of the lecture hall. Many wore the robes of senior academics. Amongst them he had the satisfaction of noting a number of his most bitter rivals. He'd be giving them a jolt tonight, he promised himself.

The chairman rose, conversation subsided.

"Gentlemen, I am delighted to introduce - not that he needs any introduction - Professor Mif of the University of Oorop. He will be talking to us about some of his interesting theories on the purpose of the treasure-filled metal containers which our remote ancestors buried all over the world, but particularly on this peninsular of Brin. Of course I need not say ..." he continued, uttering inanity after inanity until Professor Mif began to suspect him of deliberately trying to send the entire audience to sleep before the lecture even began. He was just dozing off himself when he realised that the voice had stopped and the chairman had half turned towards him.

Professor Mif rose. There was sporadic applause.

"I am not yet so old," snapped the Professor, "that I expect to win

applause for the simple act of rising to my feet." He glared at the audience. The academics coughed and looked at the ceiling. The students grinned.

"I don't doubt," began the Professor (in a tone implying that he did doubt, very much), "that most of you are familiar with the metal canisters in question. In appearance they are cylindrical, about three feet long and two feet in diameter, although sizes vary somewhat. The open end has sometimes been found with a lid, having a handle on the outside. We may assume that in those cases where there are no lids, they have simply been lost. There are also two handles on the canisters, one on each side, in such a position as to suggest that the canister normally stood on the flat end with the lid at the top.

"The contents of these canisters varies widely, but in general consists of metal artifacts, possibly containers, and glass bottles, obviously containers of some sort. Very careful analyses of some of these bottles have shown traces of nourishing fluids. In addition, there are usually piles of mouldered paper, covered in the now illegible script of the ancients. There are often bones, usually of animals or fish. Perfectly preserved examples of

plastic art are common. In addition, all sorts of minor bric-a-brac occurs - nails, clothing, wooden objects, sheets of glass, now broken of course, pottery and earthenware, also generally broken, and dozens of other articles whose nature and purpose is as yet undecided, although I have theories on some of these artifacts.

"These treasure-filled containers are found in many parts of the globe, but are most common in Oorop and Norfam-riga. They have been especially well preserved in Brin, presumably because of its sparse population. The date of their manufacture is disputed but I incline to the view that they were made when Brin was still an island, before the straits were filled in connecting it to the mainland of Oorop. They seem to come from a fairly narrow time range, whenever it was."

Professor Mif paused. His audience had a definite air of somnolence. The Professor picked up the water jug - and dropped it on the floor. It exploded like a bomb, and everybody woke up.

"I do apologise," said the Professor, "if I startled anyone. The handle must have been slippery." He resumed his lecture.

"So much for the facts. Now we come to the superstitions - I beg your pardon - suppositions about the purpose of these artifacts.

"Several theories, or should I say wild guesses, have been put forward as to the purpose of these canisters. Some would have us believe that they were used as containers for transporting goods! Would anybody here be so stupid as to try and transport safely a mixture of iron, glass, pottery and animal products all stuffed into one hold-all? I venture to think that there are some here who would, but I credit the ancients with more sense."

A man in the back row got up and left, treading on five pairs of feet (four belonging to other people), accidentally brushing against the light switches and plunging the hall into darkness.

Professor Mif continued to lecture, not even blinking when the lights were switched on again. As he savaged one

theory after another, little groups of people rose and left. At first the Professor appeared unconcerned at these departures, but after a while he broke off and directed a few brief but fierce sentences at the chairman. The chairman demurred. The Professor stiffened and swelled visibly. The chairman capitulated.

The Professor turned once more to the audience.

"I have to announce ladies and gentlemen, that the doors have been locked. There is therefore no need for you to leave your seats.

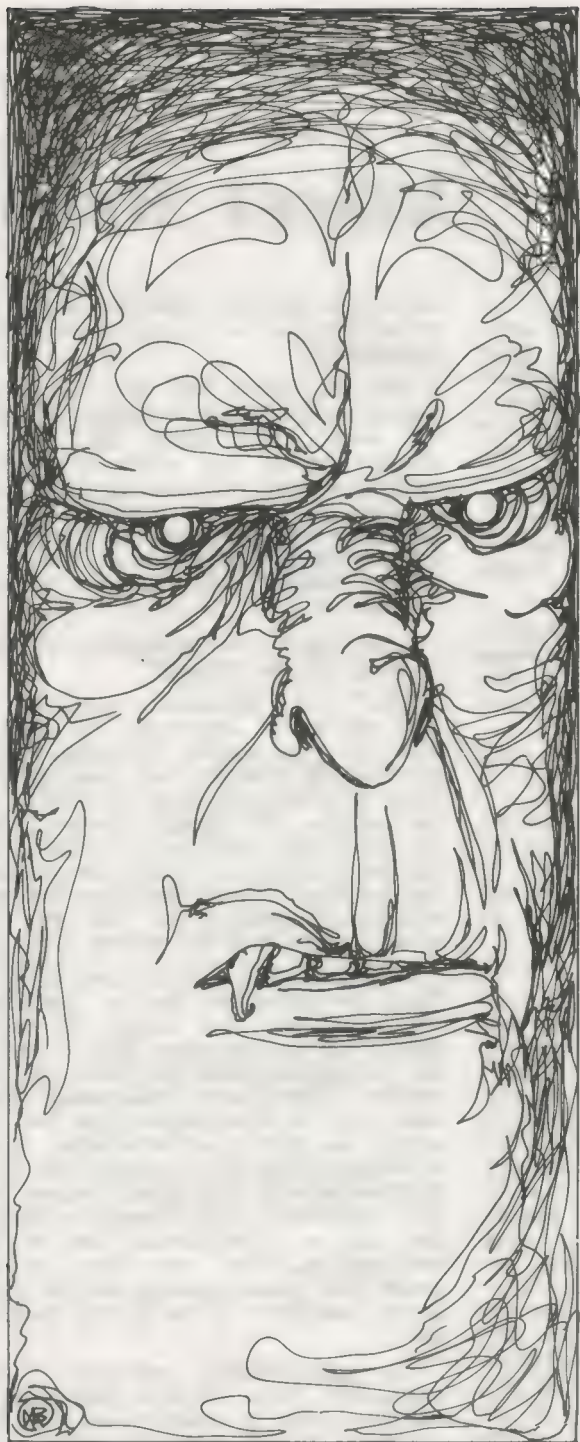
"I come now to the main point of my lecture - the real purpose of these canisters. It is really self-evident that these containers must have some religious significance; primitive people make a fuss about very little else."

An elderly cleric in the front row who had been nodding eagerly, looked slightly aghast and began to mumble the exorcism under his breath.

"The canisters almost invariably contain a good deal of dust, mainly organic in origin as is shown by careful chemical analysis. I assert, gentlemen, that this dust is in each case, the cremated remains of a primitive man, buried with a selection of his possessions, and with food and drink for the journey into the world beyond. Nothing else can explain the strange mixture of goods found in these containers, nor the durability and exquisite workmanship of the canisters themselves. And, gentlemen, my explanation is supported by inscriptions found on the burial urns in question." He paused and looked round before continuing, a note of triumph in his voice.

"You will all have heard the translation of that phrase from the scraps we have found of the most common book of the former age - I refer to th phrase 'Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust' - a reference to the mortality of man. Some of these urns have stamped on them a phrase which is a mixture of ancient English 'Dust' and obsolete Jeirman 'Bin' - which means 'I am'. The inscription therefore reads 'I am dust'."

THE END



One woman
put me here,
this submerged
island
of monkeys,
the lawyers
chatter, the
judge
grunts,
the jury of
baboons
pick at
each
other.

They want
to call me
insane.

One dull
woman
who couldn't
sleep
that night
of all nights:
she saw, she
screamed,
she brought them
running
before I could
wash the smell of
gasoline
from my
hands.

They saw me
smile
into the flames,
they want
to call me
insane.

The judge
pulls his face,
the baboons
yawn, the trolls
sleep,
and my
defender
repeats
his
lies.

I spent two years
planning my crime,
and they
want
to call
me
insane.

The Courtroom

Jon Daunt

QUIRK

Albert Russo

It was almost dawn when Krk landed on the Place de la Concorde. The lamp-posts were twinkling and looked like those fireflies Krk had been shown during one of those Earth holoscreenings. But as s/he glided towards the one nearest to hr they suddenly all died out and the magnificent square now shrouded in mist seemed to be collecting itself. Krk the realised that in spite of all the knowledge acquired on Purple, s/he'd just made hr first mistake.

Hopping over to the deserted arcades of rue de Rivoli Krk saw a shadow creeping on the opposite side of the pavement and recognizing it s/he exclaimed, "Kat!"

The animal arched its back and let out a long rattling hiss.

"Hello Katsssss," Krk said, returning the hiss, convinced s/he was doing the proper thing. Puzzled, Kat stared at Krk for a while to make sure the stranger wasn't trying some funny trick on him.

"You're the first Earthling I've met," Krk said, adding: "Would you accept an interview? I understand you get paid for such services. Though I don't have money I brought you this," and Krk produced a pearl-shaped source of light which s/he applied to Kat's nose. The light source glowed to a purplish hue and it appeared to Kat all of a sudden that the air, which usually smelled of exhaust fumes, had become very light and very pure. Kat felt slightly elated.-Skeptic by nature, he preferred to keep his thoughts to himself. But whereas only a moment ago he would have run past the stranger, he now found it quite safe to be approached by hr. Kat was more surprised by his change in attitude than by Krk's appearance. Then, in a friendly tone, Kat said, "Let's cross over to the

Tuileries gardens. Monsieur Carton must be waiting for me by the kiosk with my breakfast."

When Krk first saw the human s/he backed away. He was a shaggy hunk of a man whose ears stuck out like red peppers and he was clad in bits of cardboard tied with strings. Sandwiched between the lids of a shoebox his sockless feet were a sight to themselves, their toes wriggling as if they were being teased by some invisible feathers.

Regaining hr composure, Krk whispered to Kat, "Is he typical?"

"No," Kat gestured, twitching his left ear as he lapped up the bowl of milk all the while Monsieur Carton, slouched on a bench, was downing half a liter of cheap red wine straight from the bottle. His stomach having ceased to rumble Kat explained, "Monsieur Carton is a clochard. Unlike their brethren overseas French bums have become an endangered species. Oh, you may talk aloud, he is hard of hearing anyway."

Kat licked his whiskers and went on, "With the advent of the new government the clochards are shyly but surely coming out in the open. Were it not for our S.C.O.P.E. campaign (Save the Clochards Of Paris and Environs), they'd have all but disappeared from the city scene. We, the stray Parisians, meowed ourselves dingo for a whole week at the kitchen gate of the Elysée Palace until the President's cook showed up. He was left with no other choice than to feed and heed us. Food, you see, is what keeps this planet going, whether you're at the source of it or at the receiving end."

Kat was getting somewhat carried away, the light source beginning to flicker like a neon ringlet. Thank goodness, for at that very minute Louis

the Umpteenth was passing by on a diamond-studded leash made of baby croc. The snow-white Pomeranian bared its fangs and growled, "Irrrrramps ..." to which, with not so much as a shrug Kat replied, "Louis grand pipi."

Kat's aloofness so astounded the Pomeranian that it plodded away tongue-tied, not even aware of Krk's presence.

As for Madame-the-dog-owner who, as usual, was wearing her early-morning leopard 3/4 length coat and was short-sighted, she mumbled, "C'est y pas possible! When are they going to remove that filthy bundle of rags from the bench? No wonder The Tuileries have been invaded by rats."

"Are they typical?" queried Krk.

A bit miffed to have been compared to a rodent, Kat hissed, "They should have kept the guillotine just for the likes of them, phew, monarchistes!"

Monsieur Carton gave a loud belch and asked Kat, pointing a finger at Krk, "Since when are you talking to a kite?"

"Don't mind him," Kat said to Krk, "he means no harm, but that remark is typical of humans. What they can't readily understand they either scoff at or feel threatened by. They get vicious. Among their own kind they're very discriminating, it's called sexycolour apartheid."

"I've noticed that," Krk said, "they seem to favour green over grey on their computer screens. But why do they spend so much energy collecting artifacts and embellishing their museums?"

Monsieur Carton suddenly jerked his head, and, trying to catch a fly, slapped his thigh then his shoulder.

"There's your answer," Kat said. "Since they accidentally appeared on our planet humans have attempted to imitate animals. They had to invent the aeroplane, the submarine and the sonar. But these remain approximations, for they still can't fly on their own nor can they live underwater. It is because they suffer from K.K.K. or Kopy Kat Komplex that, taking revenge on their models, humans wreak so much havoc."

"Take Monsieur Carton, he was a painter in his youth and he too wanted

to interpret Nature, only he couldn't convince his peers. They saw trashcans where in fact it was a field of tulips. Thank God he has me, he would have ended up raving mad like poor Van Gogh."

"What are they doing?" Krk interrupted as two joggers ran past them.

"Trying to frog-leap," said Kat. "This is no place for frogs, they end up with their legs sautéed in garlic sauce. Not that we, Kats, are much better off. To reproduce the songs of birds on their violins, do you know what they use? Katgut! And hear this. My friend Mistigris and Mademoiselle Moustache returned from their Mediterranean escapade utterly distraught. They had gone to North Africa for a break. From their bungalow room one night, they heard a strange noise, like the rumblings of a distant volcano. The next day Mistigris learnt the truth from a local Kat. The personnel of the hotel had gathered one hundred among our Kat folk, brought them to a neighbouring quarry and blown them up with three charges of dynamite. The employees were then rewarded 1 dinar per Kat. The excuse was that the local Kats were eating the guests' breakfasts and thus nibbling away foreign currency. When you think that in ancient Egypt we were worshipped!" Kat's ear began to twitch again and he got so worked up that it took the light source a good five minutes to appease him.

"I shall make a confession," said Krk. "Purple had originally intended to make a deal with humans, instead, we are going to help you and the other animals gain back full control over your planet. The humans will be restricted within the confines of their zoo-like cities until they re-discover the fundamentals of life."

* * * * *

Buzz. Wham. Bam. Kat opened one eye. It was Monsieur Carton quarreling with a bee over the leftovers of a croissant.

"Cut it out, you two!" said Kat. He yawned and turned his attention to the kite which had just landed under his friend's bench. "How about that plan of ours, Krk? Still holding?"

THE END

DEAD EYES

Sam Bayley

You turn away from the shelf, holding the books under your arm. He is standing in front of you, blocking your way. He is tall, very tall, nearly seven foot. He is wearing a light brown suit, brown shoes. His shirt collar is dirty, his tie crooked, his hair wind-blown. He looks at you. His eyes are grey. And you realise that you have met him before.

The ice-cream seller at Blackpool, you must have been five; or were his eyes blue? Or the man in the church, when you married Dave - no, his eyes were green. Or that same church, a year later, for the funeral: but his eyes were brown.

He steps aside for you to pass. The librarian stamps your books. There he is again, holding the door open for you. His mouth is opening; he is saying to you:

"Let me buy you a cup of coffee; there's a little shop down the road; it would get you out of the rain."

You nod dumbly. It isn't raining.

You look across the greasy table at him, the coffee steaming in your hands. Then you see his eyes again. They are darker. Black, no, deep, deep purple. He is talking again:

"Are you married, Sarah?" How does he know your name?

"Widowed. Don't you re-" You stop yourself just in time. There you are: if he'd been at the funeral he would have known.

"Another coffee?"

"We-ell ... I shouldn't ... oh, go on then."

"Do you work?" He doesn't know that, anyway.

"Yes, I'm the beauty consultant at Smythesons."

"Smythesons?" He looks puzzled.

"The department store on the High Street." He must know it.



"Yes, how-how stupid of me. The name just didn't click when you said it." He smiles. "What a beautiful locket. May I?" He leans across the table and opens the locket.

"Your husband?" You nod. "I'm so sorry. Would you like more coffee? Or can I give you a lift home? My car's only just round the corner."

"No, no thank you. I've got some shopping to do, and a friend I have to visit. Thanks anyway."

"Could I see you again? Friday, perhaps, or Monday?"

"Well ..." Why? You hardly know the man. Why not? He grabs you by the shoulders.

"Monday, Monday ..."

"Mrs. Munday, Mrs. Munday!" Your eyes open. The room spins round you.

"Mrs. Munday, are you alright? The anaesthetic should have worn off by now."

You sit up. The chair creaks. You

remember now.

"Yes. I'm alright. And my knee?"

"Your knee is fine, Mrs. Munday, just go easy on the aerobics, now won't you." The doctor smiles. "I'd like to see you again in two weeks - sooner if it gives you any trouble. Would you like a cup of tea while you're waking up? My receptionist will get you one."

A fat woman bearing a cup of tea waddles in. She looks like a frog. The frog smiles; her cheeks bulge grotesquely.

"Did you have a nice dream? My husband, poor dear, he dreams he's locked inside a cabbage."

You smile; not at the dream, but out of sympathy for the man who married a frog. You drink the tea. It is too sweet, and too weak, and burns your throat. The frog stands watching you, and then takes the empty cup off you.

"Thank you" frog. "Goodbye."

The telephone is ringing as you enter your flat. "Hello?"

"Mrs. Munday?" No - it can't be. "Do you remember me? We met in the library this morning; we had coffee, but you left before we could arrange anything else. I was wondering, as we've been having such glorious weather just lately, would you like to go to the coast?"

No! "Yes; Monday?" Monday, Monday, Mad Munday. Why not? He was only a man you'd met in a cafe. But ...

Have two aspirin and go to bed, and forget about it.

* * * * *

You wake up hot and sweating. The eyes are looking down at you, following you. You splash water on your face, and remember that you are supposed to be going out with Gerald. You don't really expect him to turn up, but he does. He is in a small, rather muddy car.

"Hello," he says, "all ready?" Why on earth were you worried? He's just a perfectly normal chap. Whose eyes change colour. Today they are grey. You get into the car."

* * * * *

The sea is invisible through a thick



layer of mist. Everything is grey. Even his clothes, which looked blue in the car, are that same colourless shade.

He takes your hand. "Let's walk." The ground is damp. It squelches under your feet. He says nothing. His hand is clammy and cold, crushing yours. There is a dark shape in the mist ahead of you. As you get nearer it turns into a small cottage.

"Mine," he says, taking a key out of his pocket and unlocking the door. You step inside into a small room. Two arm-chairs stand guard over the fireplace, and a thick red carpet covers the floor. Apart from these the room is strangely empty of both furniture and ornaments.

Gerald snaps his fingers, and a spaniel comes bounding out of another room.

"Dog - meet Mrs. Munday," he says to - him? her? Why should the dog's sex bother you? "Sarah," you mumble, embarrassed without knowing why.

"Dog meet Sarah," he says. "I never had much imagination for names." He

turns abruptly and walks out of the cottage, with you and Dog following behind. You walk along the cliffs for maybe half an hour. His hand still holds yours, but he walks quickly, evidently deep in thought.

"Gerald ..." You are afraid to ask. But also afraid not to know. He stops walking and looks at you.

"Your eyes, they - they change colour ..."

His hands are carressing the back of your neck, running up and down your back. His lips, encircling yours, are cool, somehow far away. The Kiss of Death.

Then he turns away and walks from the edge of the cliff, far, far out into the mist, until even the black silhouette is gone. Only the eyes remain.

Dead eyes.

Dog tugs at your skirt and whines softly. You turn and walk back to the car.

THE END

CONGRATULATIONS!

We are very proud to report that Simon Clark's story '... BESIDE THE SEASIDE, BESIDE THE SEA ...' (B.B.R. #4) has been selected by Karl Edward Wagner for DAW's 'THE YEAR'S BEST HORROR XIV' to be published in the U.S.A. this October/November. It's also Simon's first ever professional sale, so obviously he 'feels like the cat who got the cream!'

Apart from on that personal level it's certainly a lesson to those who knock the small press and say that whatever is published therein is ignored and that small press writers never get anywhere ...

We wish Simon and all our other contributors every further success in the future.

THE DISMEMBERMENT OF NATH HUGHTON

Nath sat with the fingers of his left hand spread across the dimmers and dials of the control dash. In his right hand he held the knife. As Houghton watched on the closed-circuit monitor he deliberately brought the blade down across the index finger of his splayed hand, applying gradual pressure. For a moment there was some resistance impeding the blade's progress, then the finger severed cleanly just above the knuckle. Houghton watched with a kind of mesmerised intensity. Nath saw the blood pulse from the remaining stump, a look of bemused detachment playing across the strong, violent lines of his face. Then the image on the screen moved on in a rapid succession of swift strong strokes severing each of his remaining fingers, leaving the thumb till last. Then the knife was moving upwards to his wrist, cutting through layers of skin tissue, cleaving bone with a sawing motion, leaving the bloodied hand to roll from the panel to the floor like a swatted insect. He was savouring the sensation of his own dismemberment. He shifted the blade upwards, slashing his face in graceful dancer's strokes, beads of blood spinning free into suspended whirling globes in the half-gravity of the craft's control room. Next came the disemboweling, and only then did the body's movements betray any sign of stress or weakness. The amused half-smile faded,

replaced by a look of total incomprehension. The intelligence behind the eyes dulled.

Houghton could sense it was losing interest.

Nath slumped. The eyes suddenly surprised, questioning. There were tears. There was no sound.

* * * * *

Somewhere in the whispering hostile night a woman screamed. The sound splashed the darkness like the haunted night-howling of phantom dogs. He dug his hands deep inside his parka. The cold was almost supernatural, the tangible chill - he imagined - of something demonic. Then the sound was lost, draining away like a single crow into the shadows. Nath and Houghton moved on through the dense underbrush ignoring all distractions. Above them their Service Machine hummed, its dull lights pulsing, the moon spilling at them through tangled autumn tree-tops that were dripping with mist.

They emerged into a sudden wide expanse of clearing. A tall perimeter fence had long since been torn down, the remaining posts still visibly strung with rusting barbs of wire. They stood at odd angles marking the security barrier's original line. The ocean of grass beyond it was waist-high,

moving gently in the slight wind like night-tide rippling away towards their objective. It was there that they could see the crudely converted lived-in autos and the make-shift bivouacs of tarpaulin and corrugated metal sheeting. And at the centre of the strange shanty town was a cluster of gaunt ferrocrete buildings. What had once been the aero-military administration and monitoring base. It looked to be deserted, probably avoided for superstitious reasons.

The two men crouched in the tangle-foot of long grass, observing the buildings through field glasses, although the hovering Machine must indicate their position to anyone who cared to seek it. Houghton felt an unfamiliar tenseness coming over him. Eventually he turned. Shadows blocked out Nath's face eclipsed by the penumbra of his helmet and visor. He could make out no expression.

"We should warn the refugees, evacuate them before we detonate the buildings." Nath indicated the haphazard shanties and inhabited vehicles.

"Tell them what?" grunted Houghton. "That we come from beyond the sky to save the world? Anyway, how do we know they're not Possessed? It's too much of a risk."

"Nevertheless, I think we should try." Nath stood up slowly, conscious of the pistol at his waist, conscious of the fire-power housed in the robot machine ghosting his every movement. Reluctantly Houghton also climbed to his feet. The buildings ahead began as dull gloom patterns, only coming firm and black-edged against the sky. They'd been abandoned for half a century, since the time of the first Possession break-outs.

Their nests of nukes remained intact in their subterranean silos.

* * * * *

The expedition began as routine, and ended as nightmare. The two-man shuttle nudging away from High Terra One, the orbital platform, and questing down towards Earth, the forbidding and hostile mother world. The men's helmets whispered their continual undertow of subliminal conversation as Houghton and

Nath watched the receding Base in their screens. Watched the green fields, the thickly wooded slopes, lakes and cities enclosed beneath the giant dome of air. Until the space-borne continent was lost in blackness, and they switched attentions to the world slipping away beneath them. As the hours of descent extended they talked.

Later, Houghton tried to piece the splinters of the mission together. Tried to reconstruct those conversations Nath had spoken in careful calculated sentences. A degree of sanity that was almost too sane and reasoned for comfort.

"Another trip to further Virdan's empire," he began enigmatically.

"What do you mean?" the question was the expected one. The two men fell naturally into the role of seer and disciple. A role Nath seemed to take cynical pleasure in. Houghton played along in order to receive the conversational pay-off. It was usually worth the wait.

"Well, ask yourself. Surely we've been friends long enough? It's not necessary for me to spell it out." Nath smiled, tauntingly, almost condescendingly. "He's dismantling the Earth's whole defensive system. What pretext is he using to justify it? Have you never wondered what his real motives are?"

Houghton felt uneasy, under attack. But he'd always trailed his heels behind Nath, and responded truculently. "I would've thought they were obvious. Everyone knows the Possessed wage wars for their own amusement. And there's nuclear weapons lying around unguarded down there. Once they start messing with them there isn't going to be much left for us to reclaim when it's all over."

"But think! Is that really valid?" The tenuous layers of planetary atmosphere reached up to envelope the ship. "The aliens, the Possessed, seek direct sensual stimulation of their freshly stolen senses through their war-games. They want to kill and be killed first hand, they want to experience the novelty of death and mutilation. That's why they discarded fire-arms and long-range field-guns in favour of swords

and knives. They've had virtual control of the Earth for a half-century, and they've never once touched nukes, or even the more sophisticated variety of conventional weaponry. Long distance impersonal death isn't as much fun."

"There are other reasons. The destruction of High Terra Three."

"Base Three was destroyed, sure - in some way we don't yet fully understand. Its loss reduces our effective force by a third, so yes it's disturbing. But it's also an evocative political issue. The possibility of further disasters to the two remaining Bases can't be discounted. So Virdan seizes on that angle to lever himself to centre-stage of the Council. The 'strong man'. Now there's no-one else but him with any effective power, he rules like a Dictator. This whole nuke-dismantling project is one that he's personally initiated. But me and you, we've done enough of these trips to see through the pretext, right? Don't you see? It's highly unlikely High Terra Three was hit by missiles from Earth. The missiles we get to dismantle are inter-continental, they were never designed to leave the atmosphere. It's not possible for them to do so. I don't believe the old power-blocks ever made such weapons. The whole project's a sham to cover up his real motives."

"Which are ... ?"

Slowly Nath explained as their ship settled to its landing point.

* * * * *

Largely, the evacuation of the shanties went well. The two helmeted men were greeted with muted surly hostility, but Nath spoke tactfully. Attempted to make the order less an ultimatum, more a request, although the fire-power of the hovering Machine left little doubt about the alternative. Houghton watched them move out in sullen columns, amazed by the ragged number of them, by the appalling filth and squalor they left in their wake. And something else. There was a wrongness about their body odour that was picked up only beneath the level of rational analysis. He was glad when they were gone. The dirt-rimmed shanties were make-shift tents decorated with mandalas and hexes,

webbed to automobiles piled together beside the ferrocrete escarpment of the silo. The walls of the fifty-year abandoned buildings were dewy with moisture, an air of mildew where leaking lead pipes left damp white nacre down its cementation.

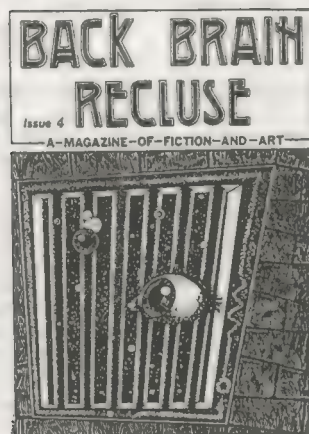
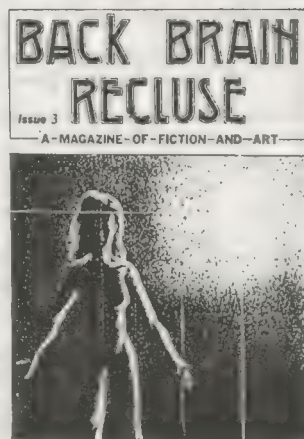
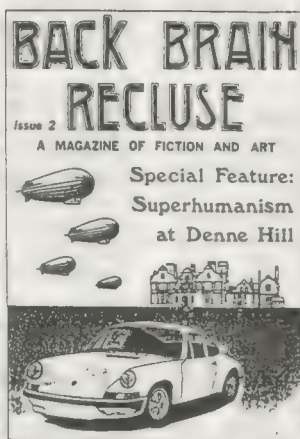
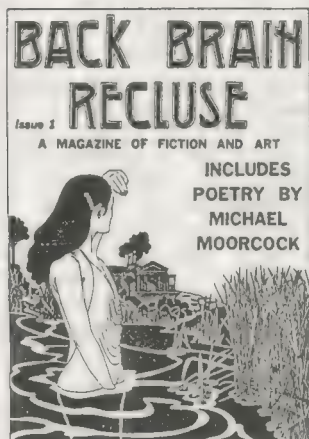
There was only one incident. Houghton gave it no thought at the time. But returned compulsively to it now as he attempted to piece the fragments of the mission together. The two searchlight beams from the Machine washed at the complex of square buildings, turning them into fleeting daylight. Shanties festered the outer blocks like weed, canvas and loose perspex flapping and cracking balefully in the slight cold wind.

He disliked nights. He'd been born in the perpetual day of High Terra One, ten years after the Possession-plague's first wave set civilisation back five centuries in as many decades. He disliked being alone. But the two men separated.

The last of the refugees had gone. Nath circled the buildings to the south, Houghton to the north, flashing torches at the shattered doors of former office complexes to discover a way into the subterranean housings. Houghton completed perhaps half his circumnavigation. Then he heard the cries. For a second they came at him, macabre cries half-ghoul, half-animal, accidents of the unconscious coming out from predatory night like a surreal movie soundtrack. He had to adjust for a full moment to register their reality. Then he acted.

Gravel hissed like tide beneath his heels, breath coming heavy at the unexpected exertion in the ponderous gravity of the unfamiliar world. Then he'd circled the block, hand clawing at his waist for the pouched pistol, every nerve a charged wire. Nath was on the ground, fallen in a protective foetus position, helmet dislodged and gone. Four ragged attackers were aiming wildly inaccurate kicks and blows at him. The assailants were refugees, even from this distance their sour sewer odour reached him. They must have hung back in the shadows awaiting an opportunity to vent their madness at something

BACK ISSUES



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tangible.

Houghton dropped to a wobbly crouch, pistol drawn and tearing back the twilight, no time for accuracy. His first shot careened off the facing of the building powdering white concrete bars, the second caught one of the grubby attackers in the arm. For a second they drew back and hesitated, leaving Nath inert and unmoving in the tangle of weed and tall grass, they seemed undecided how to deal with the sudden intrusion. A third shot, loosed with greater accuracy, settled the issue. One of the refugees fell, half his face blown away, and the remaining attackers scattered to the cover of the surrounding woods.

Houghton holstered the gun and moved to Nath's side, replaced the vital helmet as soon as he could. Later, in memory, he could see Nath stand, bruised and shaken. He seemed alright. He nodded affirmation to Houghton's enquiry, and, although he'd not spoken, physically he seemed unscathed by the incident.

Yet that must have been the moment of his Possession.

* * * * *

Conversations, lectures, in antiseptic halls shielded by ribbons of steel.

"It's difficult to be accurate, either about the nature of the 'Possession Plague' or about when it began. There's evidence suggesting that throughout human history, and prehistory, there have been seedings of individual isolated bacillus, contemporary opinion assigning them to demons, or later - to insanity. History records break-out waves of Possession: the American witch-hunts of Salem, and those of James I of England. Previously inexplicable archaeological remains show entire primitive cities decimated by mass suicides. They can now be explained as early plague attacks, and from such research we can learn much."

Lecture rooms in High Terra One opening out over the hostile Planet that exiled them. Commentary continuing. "The frequency of the attacks came in historical waves, cycles rapidly escalating towards the latter half of the Twentieth Century. At first they

were sporadic and seemingly uncoordinated. Factory workers leapt into the gears of their machines, clogging the mechanisms with their crushed bodies. Airline pilots navigated through tower-blocks or into the centres of cities. 'Berserkers' ran wild in crowds spraying people with machine-gun fire. Snipers on roof-tops picked off individuals on the street, before turning their weapons on themselves. There were contrived autowrecks and derailments. Then the more spectacular, but apparently motiveless political assassinations and terrorist bombings that were first blamed on revolutionaries or lunatics."

"Yet the plague settled like fog, until patterns began to emerge. 'Plague-maps' can be plotted in ripples spreading out from high-water marks of attack through whole cities, leaving wakes of murder and mutilation behind them. Rational explanations seem frail and impotent before the ferocity of the new barbarism. Society devolved through military Dictatorship to satanic anarchy in the face of mass insanity. To the enlightened few, it soon became apparent that Earth was suffering a kind of extra-terrestrial invasion, while what remained of its once vast population fell back to mysticism and witchcraft ..."

Derek Houghton and Nathaniel 'Nath' James went back a long way together. The loss of Earth was already history as they grew to maturity through a numbing repetition of briefings. Only the three orbiting High Terra platforms, or Bases, remained free from attack. They'd been constructed to absorb excess population and provide fertile graneries to supply the planet beneath. Only there, in space, did science remain intact, only there did a generation grow without the taint of Possession. It was space-borne research that was able to prove the term 'Possession' accurate. The mind of the victim was swamped by a foreign agency, a sentience that then controlled the motor-activity of the body as the host looked helplessly on. The few who'd experienced Possession and survived were taken to the Bases for interrogation. Many were dissected.

In Houghton's twentieth year the

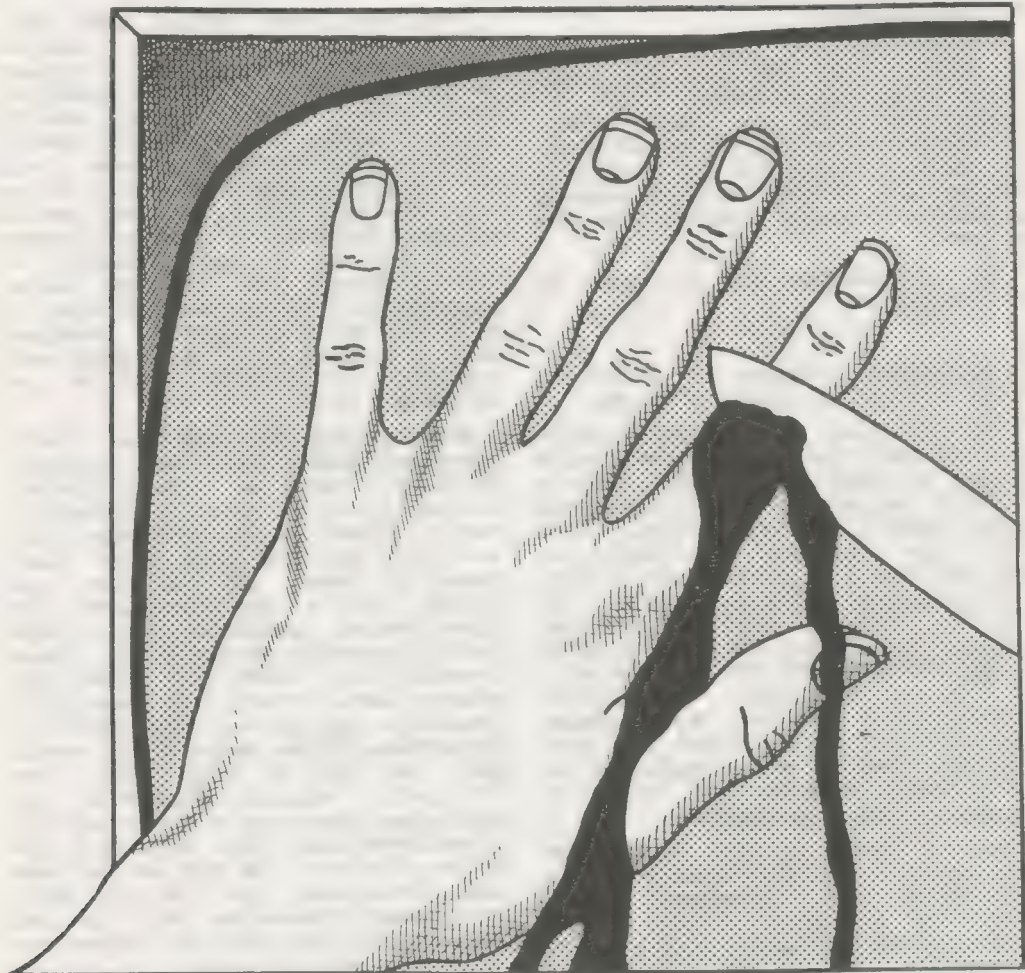
inexplicable destruction of High Terra Three meant the quest for an antidote was accelerated, even though the origin and nature of the 'aliens' remained obscure. Were they physical beings projecting their minds across gulfs of space into new bodies? Were they naturally disincorporate intelligences? Did such terms have any relevance at all? Elaborate theories of psychic inter-dimensional transference were constructed, but remained unproved; while on Earth the plague took on new forms. The attacks became less destructive and brief, the Possession stretching from hours into months into years, groups of victims forming colonies, constructing

bizarre alien cities.

* * * * *

The planet turned. A crescent of blinding intensity below them. And High Terra One, revolving slowly about its axis, taking shape before the observation blister of the shuttle. Houghton watched Nath handling the controls, waiting for the retros to blaze slowing their speed to match orbits - but instead found himself watching acceleration climb. Needles teetered into critical as velocity increased and Nath locked the trajectory into position.

Silence roared. They faced each other



across the dash - as suddenly it hit! Somehow, Nath was Possessed. In his murderous insanity he was intent on ramming the ship clear into the Base, destroying both. In vacuum the explosion would last a nano-second, but it would leave nothing in its wake but debris.

It was Nath's fingers that clawed at him, Nath's eyes that burned like novae beneath the penumbra of his helmet, Nath's lips compressed tight and soundless - but it was no human intelligence that launched Nath's body across the cabin-space. Houghton reeled back in a stomach-wrenching jerk before the unexpected attack, back across the floor, ribs aching and red hot. Climbing to his feet as Nath charged again Houghton parried, feeling his opponent's unnatural strength. He bunched his heels into his stomach, smashing both fists at the exposed throat, dislodging his helmet. But its only effect was to deflect the attack slightly. Houghton's hair prickled as the craft hurtled, velocity increasing, aimed at the heart of collision.

And they fought in dumb combat ballet, breath grating hard.

Then Nath was clawing a pistol from his holster, a burst of white fire inaccurately searing the air between them, and Houghton retreated, forced back, out of the control room into the steel corridor beyond, sealing the lock between them to bar pursuit.

But Nath had time on his side. All he had to do was wait.

Houghton thought fast. Moved to the radio shack where a screen panned across the control room enabling him to watch. By now the Possessed man was immobile, squatting on the floor. Time slid effortlessly towards impact in an eerie calm. Houghton watched the room he was unable to reach, the controls he could not influence. He tried to think methodically, something Nath always did so much better - and now they were in direct conflict. Now he had to out-think him, or they were both dead.

High Terra One's defensive web of radar should detect the shuttle in time. Theoretically, they had time to launch an interception missile before it could hit. It was possible that if

the Base was alert and coordinated it could survive in this way. But they'd both be dead.

Was there no alternative? It was Nath who made decisions, not him, it was Nath, always Nath. He tried to work out ideas but they wouldn't come. Nath's eyes were mocking - "inept" they accused. He knew they were right. He couldn't fight and win. He wasn't equal to it. But he shuffled memories back and forth. Why was the Base untouched by Possession? Because of an accidental by-product of maintenance technology. The presence of a low but continuous back-cloth of sound, almost subliminal, at alternating frequencies. It seemed to deter - perhaps even destroy the sentience that lay behind the Possession plague. So what then? What then? The Bases planned their counter-offensive, that's what. They began their attempt to reclaim the planet using the principle of frequency deterrent. Giant transmitters were being constructed on the two remaining Bases that would bathe the entire planet in continual emanations of sound. Once completed, the aliens would be either destroyed or routed. The Plague of Possession would be over, a constant space-borne deterrent remaining to ensure it could not recur. And the work of reconstruction could begin.

But now, in the meantime, all expeditions to Earth were equipped with helmets. Each helmet fitted with sound systems to reproduce the frequency safe-guarding them from attack. So far the procedure had worked.

Until Nath. Until Nath.

He paced the radio shack consumed by feelings of impotence. Possession must have occurred at the silo during the skirmish with the refugees. It was only then that Nath's helmet had been removed. The attack had been well-timed and coordinated. No longer could Possession be considered a largely random phenomenon. The aliens were learning to use the bodies they'd invaded in carefully contrived strategies. Nath's helmet must have been nullified by the refugees before it had been replaced. Then the alien had successfully disguised its presence for as long as it took to accomplish its task. That meant they were aware of the threat the Bases

A PLAGUE OF POSSESSION

Andy Darlington

posed to their domination of the world, and they were taking steps to eliminate that threat.

Houghton returned to the monitor. Nath hadn't moved, the parasite in his skull biding its time. It would survive the collision. It could escape at the last moment before impact. Nath would not.

Houghton noticed Nath's helmet had again been knocked clear. It lay in the corner of the room where it fell during their brief struggle. Blindly he realised that the alien was now open to attack.

Swiftly he removed his own helmet, fingers slow and awkward, the sudden silence unnerving. There was a repellent crawling feeling at the back of his head. The alien sentience extending feelers into his vulnerable brain? Questing like obscene tentacles through his mind, searching out weakness? He tried to fight the disturbing sensations. At any second he could become the victim of Possession - but neither alternative seemed preferable: death as the shuttle impacted High Terra One, or death as an interception missile destroyed the ship.

He worked with a degree of coolness that surprised him, deftly hooking helmet sound-system to intercom channels. There was movement on visual, as if the creature that had been Nath could sense danger. The figure on the screen stood up, its eyes prowling as if uncertain what action to take. The air was stuffy and thick. Houghton felt weak, drained. The Bases were keeping the lapse to find darkness at bay - but they'd fail! The odds were too great and too persistent. His jury-rigged wiring was just some arcane ritual, like hanging garlic or the divination of entrails. He'd lose, lose ...

The voice was not his. His fingers would not move. NO !!! He thumbed the intercom, spun the volume all the way. Instantly monotonous sound flooded the ship from end to end, the subliminal gnawing frequency channeled from Houghton's helmet through every amplifier and speaker on the shuttle.

He swung his attention to the monitor. Nath was screaming, hands over

his ears. The image on the screen lunged towards the control panel, hands forced before him like a sleep-walker, trying to reach the intercom shut-off. But he couldn't make it, slumping instead into the chair before the dash. Then Nath sat with the fingers of his left hand spread across the dimmers and dials. After a few moments his right hand unsheathed the knife from his waist. Houghton watched as Nath brought the blade down across the index finger of his splayed hand, applying gradual pressure. For a moment there was resistance impeding the blade's progress, then the finger severed cleanly just above the knuckle. Houghton watched the self-laceration with a kind of mesmerised intensity. The alien in Nath's head, realising its defeat, was carrying out a terrible revenge.

* * * * *

Half an hour later it was all over. Back in the control room he unhooked the auto-pilot, ignoring the bloodied corpse, and took the shuttle in a long trajectory away from its suicidal collision course. He passed low over the expanding dome of High Terra One and out into space again. There was time enough for a second approach, and for an eventual safe landing.

He sat back as perspiration broke out across his forehead. The crescent of Earth was visible beneath him. There was a good chance that its invaders would now be routed. That human beings would resume control of its surface, untoubled by alien interference.

Yet Houghton's sudden rush of exhilaration was mixed in with the memory of Nath's doubts. the REAL NATH who'd died at the silo, not this mutilated obscenity. He'd explained how Virdan planned to extend his political empire across the newly liberated Earth. How he'd use the threat of Possession - vanquished only by HIS control of the Base transmitters - as the ultimate planetary blackmail.

When that time came, a caucus of resistance must be ready to oppose the prospective tyrant. Houghton would make the creation of that resistance group his personal monument to Nath's death.

THE END

JHF GOLDEN BOUGH REVISED

Don Webb

The dying god regretted the Aristotelian form his career had taken. Beginning Middle End. Well at least Middle and End. Beginning he was none too sure about. It happened - he supposed - in his youth perhaps travelling as a sailor on Grecian seas. Such metamorphoses had once been common. He had no doubt felt it coming on - perhaps attributing the fever to a case of stomach flu or too much retsina.

His method of dying also left much to be desired. Other gods had chosen crucifixion, dismemberment or spatial banishment. Banishment was elegant. The dying god thought of his old friend Quetzalcoatl endlessly speeding through a closed circular wormhole unaware that his ancient battle with Tezcatlipotlia was forgotten, his people living in the smoke-filled canyons of Mexico City.

Mexico City Blues.

The other dying gods had wisely put death at the centre of their careers. But most of them had been farmers living out harvest dramas. They left easy-to-remember myths with mnemonics like spring flowers, green fields, harvest dances, and bare earth.

He had never invested in a good myth. Set had told him Boy get a Good Myth

and they'll believe in you forever.

Set wasn't doing too bad these days although most of his worshippers were ceremonial magicians. Set set a great store on those mumbo-jumbos. He'd been planning a come-back for centuries.

The dying god was dying of attenuation. Superannuated. Getting thin in Time.

He'd been a sailors' god. At least he thought he'd been a sailors' god. His forearms were tattooed. He'd never got his land legs. He had travelled a great deal. Even the last few centuries as he fell from grace there was an endless string of boarding houses, jets, taxis, rowboats, hotels, customs, oceanliners, and trains. He remembered very few places clearly.

He had loved a mortal woman once in the state of Oaxaca and sired a son who became a great magician. For two generations after his son's death a troupe of black-shawled women kept prayer vigils and made special pilgrimages in his son's name in the hopes that he might be elevated to sainthood. Rome was silent. The old women died, the candles burned out, the painted shrines faded.

His son had been on his way to godhood. But as his son's cult waned, his son waned; and eventually the dying god had to absorb his son.

It was a pity.

The dying god had hoped to obtain immortality through his son - to leave a mark on Time. But all fathers wish their sons to follow in their footsteps.

The dying god knew this room smelling of stale boarding house flesh was his last. He could no longer hear the lapping sea waves. In other towns he'd been able to hobble down to the square and talk to old men of their Navy days. Or perform small magics like materializing a ship in a bottle for a group of dusty and awe-eyed kids. Or win the old bet that he could hold his breath longer than anyone for drinks at the V.F.W. Hall.

He had invested in mythology too late. He had hopes of creating a cult in America. He managed to inspire a few stories - put a few words in the

language through his artists. But even by then his power had waned. The myth became farcical, only the merest echo of himself.

St. Elmo.

In the middle ages he fell under the cathedral shadow of another god and became a saint less and less real.

He should have taken steps then, but he was too busy charting the Pacific and performing miracles for brown-skinned Polynesian women.

Sex had ruined the best of them: Zeus, the Serpent, Odin.

Don't believe that old story that Odin lost his eye at Mimur's well in exchange for knowledge. He lost it in a mead hall on the drinking horn of a jealous man.

The dying god tried to

When she brought his tray in, the landlady found Mr. Popeye dead.

THE END

HANDS THAT DO DISHES

BY
D'ISRAELI
D'EMON
DRAUGHTSMAN



BOY PUSHING MAN = WONDEROUS = SEARCH = SHUT

H.R. Felgenhauer

The sound was as if a cannon had gone off near the ear, and was as loud and slashing as an iceberg sheet cracking off of an ancient glacier and sloshing into the frothy waves of the Antarctic Ocean. The entire swimming pool section of the field-house shook as if subjected to a sonic boom, then vibrated alarmingly as if amidst an earthquake. The powerful waves crashing through this report seemed to indicate that Moby Dick had surfaced and begun thrashing in the deep end of the High School swimming pool. Reverberations were quickly followed by some fairly frantic gasping and splashing accompanied by screaming and cursing. Strangely enough, no-one laughed.

It was one of those hot spring days, except the time was early in the morning and a nasty chill in the air was still quite tangible. It bit and stung like antiseptics on exposed skin. All the boys loved to swim; NOT early on chilly mornings however. As they stood in their rows, dripping and shivering, they knew the temperature would most likely hit seventy or eighty degrees Fahrenheit by noon or so. Unfortunately the clock on the wall told a sad tale: 7:15 am.

Most of the school boys were stoned enough that the cold shock of jumping in the early morning pool could be a lot of crazy fun. But responsible adults have a way of stealing the fun right out from unsuspecting kids. The adults have a system. In this case the adults' system amounted to having kids take a shower BEFORE getting into the pool. So now the swimming class stood shivering and dripping in their two intermural lines as old Mr. Timebiber called the roll; then he explained the racing format they would pursue that morning.

Mr. Timebiber was a nice enough sort, the boy everyone called Cheesy believed, but he should have let them skip the shower. Old Man Timebiber was scouting all his classes for prospective swimming team members. The whole school knew it, and those not interested deliberately swam poorly in his class. But he was a pretty nice guy. He would speak to them about his pipe collection, and he even seemed interested when Cheesy and his friends would tell him about buying old World War Two souvenirs opium pipes from Japan, from private collectors' widows. They told him how to carefully split the pipestem, remove the ancient, encrusted opium residue by gently scraping, and then seal the pipestem up again just as good as new.

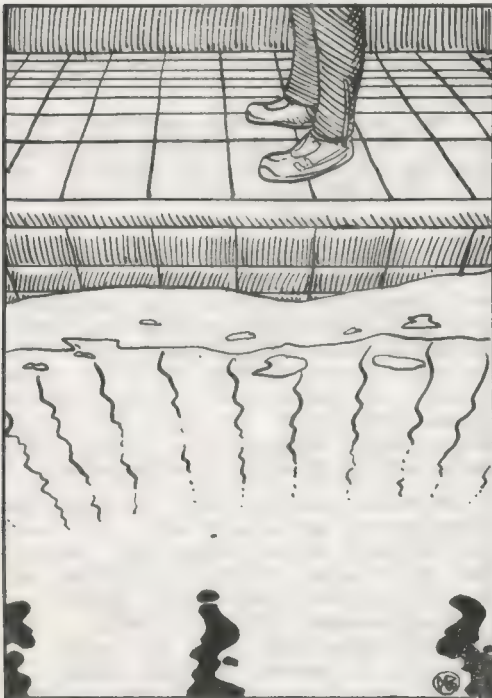
They told him how some of their older, more stupid, friends had been hitting the stuff up, and swore it was for real. "You can watch cartoons with your eyes closed!" they had informed him.

Mr. Timebiber seemed genuinely amused and pleased to speak of pipe collections with long-haired weirdos that year. He would smile mischievously and claim to have several of the war-time opium pipes - and several even older Chinese pipes. When asked to sell to fellow enthusiasts however, he would only smile and go on about his business.

There was another side to Old Man Timebiber as well. Like when he would get all bent out of shape just because the kids were hiking, blocking and tackling during basketball games, or playing baseball with footballs. Then he would scowl and growl the order for push-ups, or worse, and they would lay on the ground screaming in mock agony, "I can't do it Coach! I can't do it!"

Sometimes he would stand on the stomach or two which he considered to be too slow at sit-ups, or sadistically stretch agonizing leg-lifts for long minutes to go around bouncing on everybody's bellies. Then other times he would laugh and enjoy patronizing the profanity-laced shoving matches so often erupting during team sports. He'd slowly break the big fights up and act as if they were no big deal when anywhere else in the school you'd get suspended for doing the same thing.

So it came to pass that the one called Cheesy stood undecided, dripping and shivering early in the morning. Perhaps if it hadn't been so damn chilly pool-side on that particular Monday morning, and perhaps if he hadn't been so hung-over and hopped-up, and if only every conceivable escape route had not been foreclosed by mandatory attendance rulings, then perhaps the boy everyone called Cheesy would not have been searching so desperately for a way out of the cold swim Old Man Timebiber had prescribed for his class that day.



Cheesy didn't actually dislike the old teacher, but he hated and despised with a passion cold swims on chilly mornings. At first the boys' intermediate swim class had hoped to watch performance films, or practice technique on dry land, seeing as it was such an unattractive morning for swimming. But no, Old Man Timebiber had been saying that they should not be sissies about these things each and every chilly morning for the past thirty five years. Stripped and showered and dripping and shivering they had been forced into swim trunks and now stood in competing single file lanes on either side of their tormentor.

That damn whistle blew shrilly like a back-to-work alarm in the middle of a nice friendly card game and the first in line were obliged to shut out those feelings akin to a polar bear's cornered prey on an ice floe and dive head long into the unforgiving arctic deeps. Each blue-lipped lad would swim his lap of the pool before the next sufferer was forced to leap into the jaws of doom. Cheesy could feel his own cold sweat pop on to his skin as his turn slowly approached an inch per instant. His stomach felt like the icy depths of Davey Jones' locker.

At first Cheesy thought he could slip back into the locker room in the resultant confusion if he did it. So he did it: he took one step out of line, two steps forward with arms extended, and thrust into the small of Old Man Timebiber's back with all his slight weight. The boys couldn't see Old Man Timebiber's face, but his arms flew up like someone who had just been shot; his body jack-knifed, thrusting the big round belly forward like a limbo dancer as he offended the water with the force of a depth charge. The murderous whistle he blew so perversely all the time went flying a good forty feet as his surprised exclamations were drowned beneath the heavily chlorinated waves pounding the pool-gutters of the deep end.

Cheesy's heart was beating like the pounding big bass drum in a John Phillip Sousa marching band. It wasn't panic, but something had gone wrong: his pride kept him rooted to the spot

BOY PUSHING MAN

H.R. Felgenhauer

with a show-off's grace under fire. Instead of flying down to the locker room under cover of commotion, Cheesy calmly stepped back into line as the other boys went silently wild. They rolled their eyes, waved clenched fists and smiled slyly at Cheesy, as he did at them; but by some wondrous arrangement no-one laughed. Their laugh mechanisms had miraculously shut down. They calmly regarded Old Man Timebiber as if they had fully expected him to suddenly jump into he pool completely clothed. Cheesy searched for a new way out. When Old Man Timebiber surfaced he needed help to clamber back on to firmament. Cheesy was the first to push forward and offer a helping hand.

"You better be more careful of your footing around these slippery pool edges Coach," he offered concerned advice as Old Man Timebiber sputtered, and hefted, and hoisted his bulk out of the pool with the help of several pushing and shoving boys. He never answered Cheesy, just said, "Boy, where's my whistle?"

"I see it!" Cheesy ill-advisedly blurted, finger whipping to point down by the grating at the bottom of the pool.

"Get it for me. Will you, please?" Old Man Timebiber requested just as soft and smooth as silk. He momentarily held his eyelids shut and arched his eyebrows like Laurel or Hardy.

So here was the rub; there was no way out. He shut out his sense of ironically wondrous horror and terror over such a turn of events, dived into the deadly, dreaded water, and searched the grating for that damn whistle. He found the water to be a pleasantly surprising several degrees warmer than the morning air above. Old Man Timebiber never asked any questions, so none of the other boys spoke a word. Cheesy climbed out looking like a drowned rat and shivering like an old alley dog in early January. Old Man Timebiber smiled at him. Feeling that wondrous sense of surprise again, Cheesy hardly heard the old teacher's words.

THESE ARE THE KILLERS

The dark of centuries has descended once again
And all the heroes dream of death that has no pain
They sleep in forests deep and ancient castle rooms
With armour on and sword in hand to fill their foes' tombs

These are the hunters that will kill you
These are the killers that are pure

Free from conscience they regain an ancient joy
Controlling their own destinies, to love or to destroy
Spirit of a hunting beast, the taste of blood is sweet
And even wolves and women come to fall upon their feet

These are the hunters that will kill you
These are the killers that are pure

But still we all must wait until their waking day
Until the mists have cleared and terror rules again
When frightened men will run, but there's nowhere to hide
And all the purest ones will feel the strength inside

These are the hunters that will kill you
These are the killers that are pure



Lyrics by GERV

BOY PUSHING MAN

"Well boys, we wasted too much time here this morning already. So you guys' free-swim time is temporarily shut off. Cheesy, put 'em through their pace-races. I gotta go find some dry clothes."

He handed the whistle to Cheesy and was gone.

Cheesy looked down at the whistle in his hand, then up at the wondrous looks on his classmates' faces. He blew the whistle loud like an air raid siren, yelled "FREE SWIM!" and strolled leisurely to the locker room. He pushed his warm, dry street clothes on to his body. He avoided the old teacher when he dropped off the whistle in the swimming office.

The incident was never mentioned again, not even when he returned all those years later and told the by then genuinely OLD man that he would never forget him. And he never did forget Old Man Timebiber - especially after buying the pipe collection from his widow.

THE END



MAGAZINES

ANACONDA, Dan Clayton, 'Dungarth', Middle Winterslow, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP5 1QL. #3-5: A5, 28pp, 50p each inc. P&P. Coming along in leaps and bounds, ANACONDA's appearance rate puts me to shame. Good presentation and artwork, plus illustrious names like Sneyd and Cuthbert adding to the range of poems, short stories, articles and reviews, plus the epic 'Herbert of Os'. No doubt #6 and #7 will be out by the time you read this.

FLAME, Nigel Stone, 20 Brooklyn Drive, Lymm, Cheshire, WA13 9DN. A5, 24pp, £1.00 for several issues. The ROUSKA gang's poetry magazine, under Nige's capable control for the first time. Plenty of poetry and the odd short story.

FOLIO INTERNATIONAL, Tom Bingham, 82 Dresden Close, Corby, Northants. #11: A5, 28pp, £2.50 for two issues (payable to Tom Bingham please). Now that Tom's taken out all the small press magazine listings (they're in a separate Directory now) FOLIO has slimmed down to a very slick production, now typeset but lacking the previous artwork and variety the news and reviews sections provided. Still a good buy.

GLOBAL TAPESTRY, Dave Cunliffe, Spring Bank, Salesbury, Blackburn, Lancs, BB1 9EU. Winter 85/86: A5, 84pp, £1.25 inc. P&P. A nice fat publication, with plenty of poetry and reviews, plus quality fiction by the likes of Jocelyn Almond, Albert Russo, Andy Darlington and others. Dave also has available ART IS THE TREE OF LIFE by Robert Clarke: A4, 18pp, 30p + 17p P&P, an impressive one-off containing Blake-inspired prose/essays and artwork; THOUGHT TOOLS/MEDITATIONAL AIDS: A6ish, 68pp, 60p +

20p P&P, a 'back pocket mindblower' of zen and tantric insights.

GRIM HUMOUR, 7 Wentworth Gardens, Bullockstone, Herne Bay, Kent, CT6 7TT. #6: A4, 44pp, 40p + P&P. 'Interviews, reviews, guff and sterf with: The Ramones, Portion Control, Motorhead, Fools Dance, The Membranes ...' in the most visual fanzine I've seen. Plenty of Groups, Ghouls and Gore to keep you occupied for ages.

LITERARY MARKETS, Bill Marles, 725 South Beach Road, Suite 105, Point Roberts, Washington 98201, USA. #24: A4, 6pp, subs \$12/yr. A directory of mainly US based paying markets for writers.

MACABRE, Wieslaw Tumulka, 14 Sheerstock, Haddenham, Nr. Aylesbury, Bucks, HP17 8EN. #4: A5, 12pp, 8p + P&P. My thanks to Steve Sneyd for passing this on to me. Contains tales of the weird and supernatural by Steve himself, plus B.B.R. favourites t. Winter-Damon, Simon Clark and others.

PURPLE PATCH, Geoff Stevens, 8 Beaconview House, Charlemont Farm, West

Bromwich, W. Midlands. #27: A4, 16pp. More poetry from one of the founder members of the Federation for the Advancement of Independent Magazines (F.A.I.M.).

RED BASS, P.O. Box 10256, Tallahassee, FL 32302, USA. #8/9: A3, 32pp, \$2.00 + P&P. A professional independent media magazine the likes of which we don't seem to have in the UK. Interviews with John Cage and Philip Berrigan, fiction by Kathy Acker, plus articles and reviews. Highly recommended.

SCAVENGER'S NEWSLETTER, Janet Fox, 519 Ellinwood, Osage City, KS 66523, USA. #20: A5, 8pp. Articles, reviews and letters. An interesting read.

SPACE AND TIME, Gordon Linzner, 138 West 70th Street (4B), New York, NY 10023-4432. #69: A5, 120pp, \$4.00 + P&P. Another one passed on to me by Steve Sneyd. A very impressive and well-established US prose fiction magazine, heading in the same direction as B.B.R. but further on down the line. Very high quality reading.

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1. $26 = L$ OF THE A
2. $7 = D$ OF THE W
3. $1001 = AM$
4. $12 = S$ OF THE Z

5. $54 = C$ in a D (with 35)
6. $9 = P$ in the SS
7. $88 = PK$
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9. $32 = DF$ AT WHICH WF
10. $18 = H$ on a SC
11. $90 = D$ in a $12A$
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14. $3 = BM$ (SHIRT)
15. $4 = Q$ in a 9
16. $24 = H$ in a D
17. $1 = W$ on a U
18. $5 = D$ in a ZC
19. $57 = HV$
20. $11 = P$ in a FT
21. $1000 = W$ THAT A P IS W
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